



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: REVIEW INTO BIAS, BALANCE AND INDEPENDENCE WITHIN TVNZ NEWS COVERAGE 2025

BACKGROUND

TVNZ's 2025/26 Letter of Expectations from the Minister for Media and Communications provided the business with clear focus areas for the financial year, including supporting trust in news.

The business has several internal and external metrics for assessing trust, including NZ on Air's 'Where Are The Audiences?' research and the AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy's report. These metrics are outlined in TVNZ's Statement of Performance Expectations. While TVNZ leadership had not identified any issues of concern in news coverage, to further support trust, a review into bias and balance was identified as an additional metric point for FY26.

In May 2025, TVNZ commissioned former ABC Australia and SBS Executive, Alan Sunderland to conduct an independent review of news content over a randomly selected week. The purpose of the review was to assess if TVNZ news adhered to its impartiality standards outlined in its editorial policies, with a view that the findings would inform a training programme for news teams.

The review took place over a 7-day period. To maintain integrity, employees were not notified in advance of the review timing. A broad cross section of news coverage was reviewed. Content from other news organisations in market was also reviewed to provide a comparison of editorial decision making. Political news stories and stories of national and international significance were a key focus of the review.

The review was conducted remotely. The reviewer did not approach editorial staff or TVNZ management to seek input, advice or explanations for any editorial choices. The review only considered and assessed the news content as published/broadcast, from the perspective of an average, reasonable viewer, listener or reader.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Alan Sunderland's review examined the following:

- Has TVNZ demonstrated due impartiality in relation to its story choice in the news coverage?
- Has TVNZ demonstrated due impartiality in its treatment of the stories of the day?
- Have the principal relevant views on key issues been appropriately represented?
- Have matters of fact and matters of opinion been clearly distinguished?
- Is there any evidence that personal, organisational or external views have influenced the gathering and presentation of news?
- Have any issues, stories or events been overrepresented or under-represented in TVNZ coverage, when compared with other mainstream news coverage?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sunderland's review did not find evidence of systemic bias or lack of impartiality in 1News' reporting.

Minor technical or editorial issues worthy of further internal discussion were identified to support adherence to 1News' impartiality standards.

Key extracts from the report are as follows:

- “The story selection and the treatment of those stories demonstrates sound news values and a firm commitment to the editorial principles of the organisation, including a commitment to impartiality. I identified no major stories run by other mainstream news organisations that were ignored, underplayed or overplayed by TVNZ in its coverage.”
- “As a whole, the stories I reviewed were accurate and properly contextualised, and where the issues were controversial and/or of significant public importance, care was generally taken to ensure all relevant viewpoints were appropriately represented. I did not see evidence of any personal, sectional or organisational interests improperly influencing the news reporting, nor did I see any evidence of opinion and facts being confused with each other.”
- “Finally, I did not consider that any particular perspectives in stories were favoured over others. Inevitably, when looking closely at a week's coverage of a range of significant stories, I have identified some areas worthy of discussion. In some cases, those areas for discussion represent potential minor breaches, risk areas to note or suggestions for potential improvement. In other cases, they are simply matters to consider when looking at best practice in managing editorial performance and ensuring impartiality and diversity of perspectives.”

The reviewer noted that the story selection and the treatment of those stories demonstrated sound news values and a firm commitment to the editorial principles of the organisation, including a commitment to impartiality. The reviewer identified five 'areas for discussion' from his review of the week's coverage:

- 1. Ensuring the widest possible diversity of perspectives**
The reviewer identified two stories where he considered that TVNZ could have explored a wider diversity of views on the topic at issue
- 2. Considering the nature of TVNZ's audience and that of the wider community when determining appropriate perspectives to ensure impartiality**
The reviewer identified one story where he would have liked to have seen TVNZ's coverage examine the impact of the issue on different communities within New Zealand
- 3. Missed opportunities for deeper coverage of key issues**
The reviewer identified that there were one or two stories across the course of the week which the reviewer described as '*underdone in the circumstances*'. The reviewer noted that '*this will always be the case in any week- big breaking news or competing editorial priorities will push issues down the daily agenda, and resources are inevitable limited, lead to tough*

choices: The reviewer discussed three stories where he considered there could have been deeper coverage.

4. The role of presenters in ensuring impartiality and a clear distinction between fact and opinion

The reviewer identified this as an issue for discussion rather than criticism. The reviewer noted that presenters should be aware of the impartiality standard if an issue is significant or controversial. The reviewer noted that this issue did not arise in the shows reviewed but wanted to note it as something for TVNZ to keep in mind.

5. Technical and timing issues

The reviewer identified the risks with carrying out a pre-recorded interview on a developing and significant story.

NEXT STEPS

TVNZ values the opportunity to have an external and independent analysis of our news programming, and we were pleased with the outcome of the review.

Sunderland's feedback has been provided to TVNZ's news teams and will form part of an annual training programme for editorial staff which will commence in FY26 H1.