



The Editorial Standards Committee
BBC Trustees
Room 211
35 Marylebone High Street
London W1U 4AA

4th August, 2009

Dear Sirs,

I have received two unsatisfactory responses to a complaint I submitted to the Today programme, and I am now writing to the ESC about the matter.

The complaint was about an item broadcast on Today on December 12, 2008, in which Roger Harrabin gave biased prominence to the need for a tougher EU emissions policy, and claimed that the declining fortunes of US automobile manufacturers were due to their failure to embrace “green” policies. The full complaint is attached, together with Mr Thomas’s response, my reply and his response to that.

My concerns are:

1. Mr Thomas was not even-handed in the way he treated evidence. Part of my original complaint was that Mr Harrabin had not done enough to point out that opposition to the EU’s emissions policies was strong. Mr Thomas responded by claiming that there was not enough space in one feature to give an airing to all sides of the debate. He also said that items by Jonny Dymond and Mark Mardell (broadcast at different times by Today, which he wrongly said I may have missed) did raise other important aspects.

In my response to him, I provided abundant evidence from elsewhere on the programme that:

- a) Roger Harrabin, in numerous broadcasts during September-December 2008, as well as the one on December 12, consistently favoured stronger EU emissions policies, but ignored or under-reported the views of those who opposed them. This, I contended, indicated that Mr Harrabin had had ample time to advance different views on the emissions policies, but had not done so. The example chosen for the complaint could thus be regarded as typical of his approach to the topic.
- b) The broadcasts Mr Thomas mentioned by Mark Mardell and Jonny Dymond in the build-up to the EU climate talks, contrary to what Mr Thomas claimed, did not adequately represent the views of those who had misgivings about the economic impact of the measures.

In his second letter, Mr Thomas rejected this important additional evidence as irrelevant because it was not the subject of the original complaint. He showed no sign of having read it. In doing so, he was being unfair. He himself had cited other programme items to support his own position, but rejected completely my attempt both to respond directly to him and to illustrate a very important point about Roger Harrabin. Yet I had used the same approach that he himself had

done. He also ignored my point that the Mark Mardell and Jonny Dymond items did not, in any case, offer a substantially different perspective from Mr Harrabin, and only very briefly mentioned concerns in many countries about the emissions policy.

This indicates that he adopted one rule for the BBC in marshalling relevant evidence and a tighter, more restrictive one for complainants.

The out-of-hand rejection of the additional evidence submitted on April 9 was doubly unfair in that it precluded any consideration of whether the bias on December 12 may have been systematic. The detailed analysis I provided showed that it was; that Roger Harrabin had demonstrated the same bias in several items through the period September –December in the build-up to the emissions talks. It also showed conclusively that, despite what Mr Thomas claimed, there was not enough material to balance this.

2. I submit that it took far too long for Mr Thomas to consider this matter. My original complaint was submitted, as the BBC rules stipulate, within one month of the original broadcast. This involved considerable effort to meet the deadline. His first reply was received by my office on March 16, nine weeks later. I understand that some delay may have been caused at the BBC end because the letter to Mr Thomas was not perfectly addressed, but this does not justify the long gap. My subsequent response – which entailed significant additional work – was sent well within a month, again adhering to the rules about time limits on submissions. Mr Thomas’s second reply, which was only two pages long, and unsigned, and ignored most of the evidence I had submitted, was dated June 22 (and not received by me until July 6); another unacceptable gap. Thus it took Mr Thomas a total of 20 weeks to respond, and even then, as I have already pointed out, he was dismissive of much of the evidence that had been submitted to him.

Again, there seems to be one set of rules for the complainant and another for the BBC.

3. Mr Thomas was not transparent or explicit in the way he dealt with the issue of anthropogenic global warming (AGW). He said baldly in his two letters that he as an editor, and the BBC generally, work from the assumption that AGW is happening. This, he contended, meant that – under the rubric of “due impartiality” – pro-AGW must take precedence in BBC coverage. In support of his position, Mr Thomas made a number of bold and questionable statements. He said that global warming is “overwhelming accepted science” based on the “quality of those making the argument”; that there was “a great consensus among scientists that the world is warming”; that the evidence is “overwhelmingly on one side”; and that the position is held by almost all the world’s leading scientific societies and governments.

I do not accept his assertion that there is a “great consensus” because many distinguished scientists disagree. Further, I believe that the reason why many groups such as the IPCC, Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund so fervently support global warming theories is that they are using the partisan “evidence” they churn out as a political weapon to force changes in areas such as the EU emissions policy. I view with great suspicion the position that governments round the world have adopted on this issue because their endorsement of global warming provides a massive excuse to impose new taxes and laws. And there is abundant evidence that scientific societies are swayed by the government grants they receive.

In my complaint, I carefully explained the basis of my opposition to the AGW theories supported by Mr Harrabin and Mr Thomas, and provided substantial evidence to back up that I was not alone. I showed that, far from there being a “great consensus”, there are thousands of scientists who strongly disagree.

Mr Thomas did not respond directly in his letters to any of my evidence or arguments, save to state that he was not sure why we had mentioned that 31,000 scientists had signed a petition saying that they disagreed with the central tenets of warming. He clearly did not understand why I had included this material – it was not to prove that there was a “counter consensus”, as he implied, or that science operated on a “consensus” basis, but rather to show that, contrary to what he maintained, there were very many distinguished scientists who disagreed with AGW.

Overall, I suggest this must be a deeply flawed and unsatisfactory approach. In effect, Mr Thomas has dismissed out of hand any idea that there is important opposition to the AGW theories. How has he arrived at a position where he feels able to do this?

As far as I can ascertain, Roger Harrabin is not a scientist, and neither is Ceri Thomas. Who at the BBC, therefore, has checked the facts and decided that there is a “consensus” that is so overwhelming that those who think otherwise are wrong? Is there a group of BBC journalists who are sufficiently qualified in relevant science to the level that they can competently evaluate complex meteorological and geophysical data and theories? Is it they who informed Mr Thomas?

If not, who are the experts that the BBC *has* relied upon to reach their partisan position? This, too, is a matter of very significant public importance. If there is a body of scientists on whom the BBC is relying for its decision that the science is “overwhelming”, they must be identified so that those who disagree with them are given the opportunity to engage in debate with them. I would stress that in my view – and that of a great number of scientists around the world – the IPCC is not a body of impartial scientists. Its reports are political documents, not scientific reports. .

It has been reported that the BBC held a seminar on January 26, 2006 at which the editorial policies on global warming were discussed and subsequently agreed. Is this the case? If so, who was at that meeting and what qualified them to make sweeping political decisions about the existence and importance of AGW? Who put the opposing case? How does this episode respect the BBC’s Charter and Guidelines?

4. Mr Thomas has rejected my point that the language used in describing the AGW material was sloppy, claiming that it would be understood by the audience. I cannot agree. The BBC has a self-declared duty to uphold the highest standards of use of English, and the phrase “climate change” has been adopted by the pro-AGW lobby to ensure that their alarmist but inaccurate predictions about climate will apply to every imaginable scenario. It is a deliberately ambiguous phrase designed to suggest that whatever happens to the weather is a problem. The BBC should make sure that they do not follow that agenda.
5. Mr Thomas claimed that he would “continue to make space” for those who have anti-AGW views to appear on the programme. The evidence I submitted showed that in the build-up to the climate change talks, no-one with such views appeared on Today, and certainly not to dispute the need for the draconian EU emissions measures. Opposition to the measures was mentioned in the

most generalised terms and were never properly explored. If such people have appeared on the programme, he should have listed when and he should have demonstrated that they were asked about relevant issues in a way that balances the biased output at other times. It is not good enough to insinuate in this general manner that I have got it wrong because I do not have enough knowledge of the programme output. In fact I do, because I have had every *Today* programme monitored for many years.

6. Contrary to Mr Thomas's assertion, I think Mr Harrabin's descriptions of the problems of the US car industry were an indicator of his wider bias about green issues. I have provided abundant evidence that this bias existed, but Mr Thomas has ignored it. Further I believe his justification why reporters sometimes get it wrong in live broadcasts shows a cavalier laxity towards standards. BBC correspondents are highly remunerated. They should be able to handle such links without making such crass generalisations.
7. I do not accept that Roger Harrabin made it plain that the need for a 20% emissions cut was the view of Mr Barroso rather than his own. If that is what he meant, it would have been easy and logical for him to have said:

“President Barroso says it is absolutely vital that to retain the EU's credibility in the UN, they have to keep their 20% headline cut. It looks to me that that will be kept; I can't believe that won't be kept.”

His placing of the alleged attribution at the end of the sentence changed the meaning significantly, and for Mr Thomas to argue otherwise is another example of a cavalier and lax attitude towards programme standards.

8. Mr Thomas's final point, that balance to Mr Harrabin's views and on the issue of “climate change” generally were provided elsewhere in the BBC's output misses entirely the point of my complaint (when and where, please?). The item broadcast on December 12 was itself biased. I subsequently demonstrated that, over time, it was typical of a systematic bias on this topic. Mr Thomas has deliberately ignored that evidence, and chosen to treat the issue in a very narrow way. I accept that there is not the time in many individual items to cover the full aspects of the important debates. But it would be expected that a programme such as *Today* would, over time, do so. On this issue, the programme has consistently ignored, or under-reported to the point of insignificance, the crucial element of the emissions debate.

I look forward to your acknowledgement, and to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Pearson of Rannoch