

Lord Pearson of Rannoch

Ms. Helen Boaden
Director, BBC News
Room 5601
BBC Television Centre
201 Wood Lane, W12



London SW1A 0PW

13th May 2011

Dear Helen -

Thank you for your letter of 9th May, which, however, does not quite reply to mine of 12th April and its enclosures.

My central point was that the BBC has not fulfilled a number of 2005 promises made in response to the Wilson Report, including to: "*offer our audiences across all platforms clear, accurate and accessible information about the way EU institutions work and their impact on UK laws and life*". I enclosed a detailed analysis to prove this failure.

The NewsWatch survey of the Today programme's EU output between September and December last year was enclosed as evidential back-up to this fundamental complaint. Of course that is out of your 30 day time limit, as any complaint must be which covers the last 6 years.

You say you are confident that your coverage is duly impartial, but the sustained, detailed evidence presented by NewsWatch strongly suggests that it is not. I know you have your own internal mechanism for evaluating coverage, but I understand that its output is not nearly as detailed as that of NewsWatch.

The BBC has particularly failed on the volume of coverage given to the case for EU withdrawal. For instance, over the 6 years since Wilson, "Today" gave 0.004% of its available time to the withdrawal perspective. Such coverage was also almost invisible in the rest of the BBC's output. This can be set against the 25.27% of those who voted in the last elections to the European Parliament, and the 5.22% in last year's General Election, all of whom voted for parties favouring withdrawal. I understand such percentages should influence the amount of coverage given, especially at election times? Recent opinion polls go further, and suggest that some 80% of your license fee payers want a referendum on withdrawal. All this shows massively greater public interest than is reflected in Today's coverage, and in the BBC's coverage generally.

As the Wilson Report also said, it is not only Eurosceptics who want the BBC to encourage a fair and informative debate on this issue. Many Europhiles are frustrated that much of the national press is increasingly Eurosceptic. So they too would welcome an unbiased national debate.

I am asking David Keighley to get in touch with Malcolm Balen, in the hope that they can have a fruitful meeting.

Good wishes -

M. Malcolm

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