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for draft reply (v LW)

**GREENPEACE**

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Sir Robin Biggam

Chairman

The Independent Television Commission

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11 December 1997

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cc [ ]

Dear Sir Robin,

I'm writing to you about the Channel 4 series 'Against Nature'. I know you will be well aware of the very widespread criticism of this unprofessional and inaccurate series.

Despite this criticism, Channel 4 have decided to continue to transmit the programmes. I assume that Channel 4 are therefore satisfied that the programmes do represent the professional journalistic standards that Channel 4's current management believes are defensible and acceptable.

In these circumstances, I'd be grateful if you could tell me if the ITC believes it is acceptable for the people that made the 'Against Nature' programme that was broadcast on Sunday 7 December to interview me at some length, and then cut my replies so that the opinion I appear to be expressing in the programme is, as they knew, exactly the opposite to the opinion I expressed in my interview with them.

'Against Nature' misrepresented the programme to me, as they did to most of those they interviewed. This would be a breach of the BBC's Producer Guidelines. 'Against Nature' made serious (and totally inaccurate) allegations against Greenpeace and many others, and gave us no opportunity to respond to these. This would also break the BBC's Producer Guidelines. I assume that these normal journalistic standards are not applied by Channel 4 to their documentary programmes - this indeed must be the case, or 'Against Nature' would not have been screened.

I'd be very grateful if you could let me know if the ITC agree that Channel 4 can operate on the basis that it's acceptable to deceive participants about the nature of the programme they're being interviewed for, and make very serious allegations which have not been put to those being accused, while the BBC do not allow these disreputable practices.

I told the people making 'Against Nature' that Greenpeace does not have any position on population, and that I would not be willing to do an interview about that. They told me that they were making a general history of the green movement, but they would want to ask me one or two questions about population in the course of a longer interview.

When they asked me about my view about the numbers of people in the world, I said that this is something Greenpeace doesn't believe is significant. In particular when asked to say how many people I thought would make an acceptable population for the world, I said words to the effect that that is not the issue. I did not say anything remotely like "further population growth over the next few decades, it's argued, will be disastrous", as the narrator of the programme suggests introducing a quote from the interview with me.

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To illustrate why the absolute number of people in the world is not an issue, I said, "If you took our planet and just put one human being on it, that human being would be consuming resources which otherwise would be available for nature - for wildlife, for wild animals, plants, whatever. Two human beings consume twice as much, and millions consume a million times as much. At what point do you start to say: this is not sustainable? Everything we do impacts on nature, and to my mind what we need to concentrate on is limiting that impact" (the words in quotes were included in the programme).

I also said words to the effect that this is why Greenpeace believes that population is not the issue, but rather we should concentrate on the impact that people have on the environment, particularly people in the developed world.

Obviously, I am paraphrasing what I said from my recollection of the interview, but it will be perfectly easy for you to check with the programme makers, by getting the full film of the interview with me. I have no doubt that it will confirm exactly what I have said.

I thus said two things which I now know completely contradicted the view that programme makers wanted environmentalists to express. I said that, as the best known environmental organisation in the world, Greenpeace was not interested in a debate about numbers of people, or limits to population.

Second, I said that Greenpeace was more concerned about the impact of people in the developed world, and that we saw that as the major issue that needed tackling.

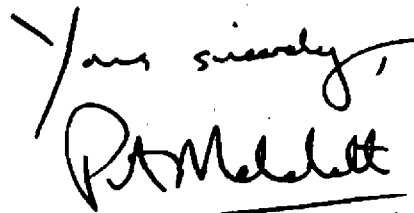
In the programme, my interview was butchered to give the impression that I had said exactly the opposite.

It's clear to me that Channel 4 did this knowingly. Indeed, there have already been sufficient complaints and controversy caused by this reprehensible series and the shoddy and underhand way it was made, for the ITC itself to know that this sort of deliberate falsehood was likely to be included in the programmes.

To be clear, what was done with my interview was that I said one thing to the people that interviewed me, and they cut the interview to make it appear that I'd said exactly the opposite thing.

I look forward to your comments on this unbelievable behaviour, and to learning what steps the ITC can take to put matters right.

I have also written to the Heritage Secretary, The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP, about this.

*Yours sincerely,*  


Peter Melchett  
Executive Director  
GREENPEACE UK