



Editorial Complaints Unit

Mr A Mallett
AFM Web Design
Bessemer Drive
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 2DX
Email: adrian.mallett@afmwebdesign.com

24 February 2012

Dear Mr Mallett

Further to our recent exchanges of email, I am writing to confirm that I will now begin an investigation into your complaints about both **The Conspiracy Files: 9/11 Ten Years On** which was broadcast on 29 August 2011 and **9/11: Conspiracy Road Trip** which was first broadcast on 8 September 2011. Our usual practice is to provide a summary of a complaint to ensure that we have a full understanding of the issues and have identified the most relevant sections of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines, which are the standards against which I will have to consider your complaint (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/>). To avoid any doubt, I should reiterate that I am only able to look at issues raised by the content of these specific programmes and not your broader concerns about the BBC's overall coverage of 9/11.

I propose to produce a separate report for each programme in which I will explain the conclusions I have reached on your complaints but, for convenience, I hope it's acceptable if I summarise my understanding of your complaints about both programmes in this letter. I have read all the previous correspondence and I hope I have captured the elements of your complaint, but please let me know if there is anything I have missed, ideally within the next ten working days.

The Conspiracy Files: 9/11 Ten Years On:

The programme presented a biased and inaccurate account of what happened on 9/11. The programme was "*blatant propaganda against members of the truth movement*" and ignored scientific facts which cast doubt on the official version of events. Specifically:

1. The explanation and analysis of the collapse of World Trade Centre Tower 7 (WTC7) failed to report that it collapsed in free fall and that this could only have occurred if the tower was brought down in a controlled demolition using explosives.

2. The programme said “*If a large passenger jet crashed into the pentagon why was the hole in the exterior wall apparently so small?*” This was designed to cast doubt on the claim and was evidence of bias.
3. The programme did not question why evidence from the Twin Towers was not preserved and why standard investigation procedure was not followed.
4. The programme said the official version of events was “*unequivocal*” but the explanation has changed, with each version contradicting the previous one.
5. The programme did not report that the procedure for the interception of hijacked aircraft changed just before 9/11.
6. The programme portrayed the makers of the Loose Change documentary as “*typical conspiracy theorists*” seeking commercial gain. This was an attempt to discredit their work.
7. The programme did not reflect the opinion of experts who question the official version of what caused the Twin Towers to collapse or report the available evidence which support the theory of controlled explosions.
8. The explanation of what caused the collapse of the Twin Towers was inaccurate. It included a theory put forward by Professor Abolhassan Asstaneh which is incorrect.
9. The programme did not question why the authorities have failed to release all the video of the attack on the Pentagon.
10. The programme did not question how a plane hit the Pentagon without damaging walls and windows.
11. The programme discredited the work of Professor Niels Harrit and included contributions which undermined his theory on the collapse of WTC7.
12. The programme did not report that mobile phone calls were said to have been made from Flight 93 but it was impossible to make such a call in 2001.
13. The programme included contributions, such as from Frank Spotnitz, which were designed to discredit and undermine those who support alternative theories as to what happened on 9/11.
14. The programme did not include facts about the FBI investigation or facts about terrorist funding.
15. The conclusion of the programme was intentionally designed to make members of the truth movement look like “*heartless individuals*”.

9/11: Conspiracy Road Trip:

The programme presented a biased and inaccurate account of what happened on 9/11.

1. The programme made it clear from the start that its approach was no open-minded and those who doubt the official version of events are delusional.
2. The programme deliberately chose five young people who did not have the knowledge or experience to put forward an alternative to the official version of events or challenge that version.
3. The demonstration to show that a person with no flying experience can pilot a plane was flawed; it did not reflect the view of qualified pilots who question whether an inexperienced pilot could have flown a passenger plane into the Twin Towers.
4. The explanation of how the Twin Towers collapsed did not include a contribution from an engineer from the truth movement to offer an alternative theory.
5. The programme did not explain that World Trade Centre Tower 7 (WTC7) collapsed in free fall and that this could only have occurred if the tower was brought down in a controlled demolition using explosives.
6. The demonstration to show that thermite could not have been used to demolish the towers was flawed and misleading.

The relevant guidelines would therefore appear to be those on Accuracy and Impartiality. You can see the guidelines in full at the above link, but I am assuming from the previous correspondence that you are well acquainted with their contents and so I don't propose to transcribe them here except to highlighting those areas which appear to be most relevant. The Accuracy guidelines include the following principles:

3.2.2 All BBC output, as appropriate to its subject and nature, must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in clear, precise language. We should be honest and open about what we don't know and avoid unfounded speculation. Claims, allegations, material facts and other content that cannot be corroborated should normally be attributed.

3.2.3 The BBC must not knowingly and materially mislead its audiences. We should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact or otherwise undermine our audiences' trust in our content.

The guidelines on Impartiality include the following:

The Agreement accompanying the BBC Charter requires us to do all we can to ensure controversial subjects are treated with due impartiality in our news and other output dealing with matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy. But we go further than that, applying due impartiality to all subjects. However, its requirements will vary. The term 'due' means that the impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation. Due impartiality is often more than a simple matter of 'balance' between opposing viewpoints. Equally, it does not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles.

There is also a section on Due Weight which says:

4.4.2 Impartiality does not necessarily require the range of perspectives or opinions to be covered in equal proportions either across our output as a whole, or within a single programme, web page or item. Instead, we should seek to achieve 'due weight'. For example, minority views should not necessarily be given equal weight to the prevailing consensus.

Nevertheless, the omission of an important perspective, in a particular context, may jeopardise perceptions of the BBC's impartiality. Decisions over whether to include or omit perspectives should be reasonable and carefully reached, with consistently applied editorial judgement across an appropriate range of output.

As I have said, if you have any comments on this summary of your complaint and the relevant guidelines, please let me have them by 9 March. If there are any issues of concern which I have not covered I would be grateful if you could let me know within the above timeframe because we can only consider new points of complaint made at a later stage under exceptional circumstances. I will aim to let you know the outcome of my investigation by 13 April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CT' followed by a horizontal line.

Colin Tregear
Complaints Director