

Background:

- The 2015 BBC Trust Impartiality Review: BBC coverage of Rural Areas in the UK made five key recommendations:
 - Identifying an individual to take on an editorial oversight role, championing rural affairs across the whole of the BBC's output and monitoring progress;
 - Increasing the measures already taken to make it easier for local and regional BBC journalists to get stories on the BBC's UK network news;
 - Re-establishing the post of BBC Rural Affairs Correspondent;
 - Bringing together BBC journalists and programme makers who cover rural affairs at least once a year to share ideas, experiences, contacts and collaboration opportunities; and
 - Broadening the BBC's rural contacts list across a wide range of expertise
- The 2016 BBC Trust's "Finding of the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust Article by Chris Packham BBC Wildlife Magazine 23 September 2016" made specific recommendations regarding Chris Packham in particular:
 - Trustees acknowledged that Mr Packham campaigned on a wide range of wildlife issues and supported a number of charities in this field. They emphasised the importance of the approach taken by both the BBC and Mr Packham to managing any potential conflicts of interest
 - The Committee observed that it will be important for both the BBC and Mr Packham to assess regularly and formally his freelance and campaigning work to ensure that it does not undermine the impartiality and independence of his work

Countryside Alliance Position:

- The metropolitan bias of the BBC is evident in the inability to implement the findings of either the 2015 or the 2016 reports referenced above.
- On the recommendations from the 2015 report:
 - A "rural champion" has been appointed, but he is the editor of Farming Today so has a clearly vested interest in defending the rural output of the BBC's flagship rural radio programme rather than challenging and monitoring the programme's output.
 - The post of Rural Correspondent has not been reestablished.
 - The BBC has not broadened its list of rural contacts. On this point the 2015 report further stated that:
 - A small number of charities and organisations have a disproportionate influence on the coverage of rural affairs at network level
 - "I found that the BBC relied disproportionately on a small number of external bodies for input and comment... There was a tendency to

- focus on the environmental aspects of rural UK: this should be balanced by the economic and social dimensions"
- The BBC has tendency to focus on conflicts or protests, turning all rural topics into a binary argument rather than helping listeners understand the subject
 - Four years later the BBC still portrays many rural issues as stark contrasts of conflicting protest groups. For example, Farming Today (22nd May 2018 recently aired coverage of the launch of the British Game Alliance, a marketing board for game meat dedicated to improving shoot management standards. An interview with the director of the new organisation was immediately followed by an interview with an activist committed to the abolition of game shooting. This approach is widespread and prevents the listener learning anything substantive about the rural issues being discussed, but instead frames the issue as a "controversial through a metropolitan prism", a key issue highlighted in the 2015 report.
 - Regarding the recommendations from the 2016 report:
 - Chris Packham is acknowledged as the face of the BBC's flagship wildlife programming, the Watches.
 - The BBC Trust could not have been clearer in its 2016 report – Chris Packham's campaigning activities should be subject to regular and formal assessments to avoid harming the BBC's reputation for impartiality.
 - The BBC Trust made that recommendation because Mr Packham had referred to game shooters as "the nasty brigade", language unbecoming of any BBC presenter, let alone one who heads up the public broadcaster's wildlife programming.
 - The BBC Trust clearly called on the BBC to regularly and formally assess Mr Packham's campaigning activities if they wished to continue commissioning him to present flagship wildlife shows like Springwatch.
 - These reviews do not appear to be happening. Mr Packham consistently trades on his BBC profile to harangue businesses and local councils, campaigning against grouse shooting in particular. Most strikingly he referred to game shooters as "psychopaths" as he prepared to lead a protest against game shooting and badger culling on the 12th August 2017.
 - On this occasion the Alliance referred this behaviour and the clear escalation of language to the BBC Executive Complaints Unit.
 - The BBC rejected our complaint, despite reprimanding Dame Jenni Murray and Dr Adam Rutherford for behaviour away from their BBC programming that brought the BBC's impartiality into question.
 - When we referred this complaint to Ofcom, we found that Ofcom are not capable to arbitrating on issues of impartiality that do not arise onscreen, so there is no way to enforce this element of the BBC Guidelines that is currently severely disadvantaging the rural community.

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