



TELEVISION
NEW ZEALAND

16 April 1992

*For Your Information
With My Compliments*
LIANNE DALZIEL
MP CHRISTCHURCH CENTRAL

Ms Lianne Dalziel
MP for Christchurch Central
Parliament House
WELLINGTON 1

Dear Ms Dalziel

Thank you for your letter.

I am sorry to read of your concerns about our coverage of the child abuse allegations at the Christchurch Civic Child Care Centre.

I understand and respect your feelings for the families in your electorate who have been directly affected by this most serious matter.

We, too, had these concerns in mind when we made a deliberate decision to withhold the story for 24 hours after first becoming aware of it. There is a limit, however, to the time we can be expected to suppress news of an incident of this magnitude.

The public's right to know (enshrined in Clause 14 of the Bill of Rights in which your predecessor played such a big part) must be recognised as one important consideration.

I believe that Television New Zealand showed the utmost restraint and responsibility in its reporting of the child abuse allegations.

Quite apart from delaying the release for 24 hours, it also urged, unsuccessfully, both the Christchurch Council and the local police to set up a help line or 0800 number which parents could use.

And you will have noticed that immediately after the item was broadcast we took the initiative in providing information for parents on what steps they should take, or not take.

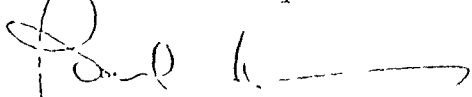
We always work closely with the Police when we cover news stories in which they have an involvement. It is our experience that the news media, generally, have developed a very professional relationship with the Police. We recognise their need on occasion to withhold information, and they recognise our obligation to the public interest.

In this case we are satisfied that our coverage in no way prejudiced the police investigation.

In response to your question about whether TVNZ takes into account the human consequences and personal hurt of individuals involved, the answer is, of course we do. But in an event where a large number of people are involved it is clearly not possible to suppress all information until every single individual has been informed. By that time innuendo and rumour (often false) would be rife. It is our view that the soundest course is to come out into the open and publish what is known, for the benefit of those directly involved and the public at large.

While I respect your view that there may have been no need to publicise this story at all, I point again to our obligation to serve the public's right to know.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Paul Morris', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

PAUL MORRIS
DIRECTOR OF NEWS AND COURTHOUSE AFFAIRS