

OFCOM COMPLAINT - Free Speech Nation on GB News - 9th June 2024

Programme details

Programme title: Free Speech Nation

Date of broadcast: 09 June 2024

Time of broadcast (24 hour clock): 20:04

Channel / station*: GB News

Your complaint

Subject:

GB News' Free Speech Nation breached Ofcom code 2.4 in condoning violence against environmental protesters.

Description:

On 9th June 2024, guest panellist Bruce Devlin said he wanted to see someone “throw salt” on the hands of climate protesters in Spain who had their glued hands “ripped” off the road, and for them to be left to “bleed in their cell”, before adding “set fire to them!” and that he “would throw tins of soup at them”. This was met by laughs and some minor pushback from other members of the panel. Devlin then declared that setting them on fire would be “an effective deterrent”.

This amounts to an endorsement of violence against environmental protesters and therefore violates code 2.4 of the Ofcom code, which forbids the condoning of “dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour”. The fact that environmental protesters have been subject to real life violence by members of the public makes these comments all the more egregious.

While framed as light-hearted, such comments can nonetheless have real-world impacts, adding to an already toxic public discourse around these issues. The vilification of climate protesters within the UK media has become so extreme that earlier this year the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders spoke out, warning that: "By deriding environmental defenders, the media and political figures put them at risk of threats, abuse and even physical attacks".

There was also not sufficient pushback to this highly controversial comment beyond the host saying that he doesn't personally endorse setting protesters on fire, while laughing. The lack of real pushback indicates a possible violation of code 5.9, requiring that “alternative viewpoints must be adequately represented either in the programme”.