

Nathan Sparkes, Director of Policy, Hacked Off—supplementary written evidence (FOJ0091)

House of Lords Select Committee on Communications and Digital Inquiry into the future of journalism

Oral evidence of Mr Wright, DMG Media

On 23 June 2020, DMG Media Editor Emeritus Peter Wright gave oral evidence to your Committee.

In response to a question from Baroness Quin on the Government’s proposed “Online Harms” regulatory regime,¹ Mr Wright indicated that the content which the prospective regime is intended to regulate is already subject to self-regulation through the industry complaints-handler IPSO.

Mr Wright said,

“As far as online harms are concerned, our concern is that this is regulation potentially aimed at addressing certain harms on the internet some of which are criminal matters. Anyway, we don't believe that we're responsible for those harms because we're already regulated. We're members of a self-regulator IPSO which I'm sure you'll be familiar with...”

There are two types of content IPSO claims to regulate. These are editorial content (published by newspapers on an editorial basis), and User Generated Content (forums where private citizens post content on newspaper websites, usually known as “comment sections”).

The Government’s Online Harms White Paper set out a regime specifically to regulate User Generated Content. While IPSO claims to regulate this content, no record exists of IPSO ever having made an adjudication regarding breaches of standards in comment sections.²

Hacked Off have found multiple examples of standards breaches which have been committed in those comment sections, including 52 examples which formed part of our evidence to the Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee.³

Thus, while IPSO itself does indeed claim to be regulating for “Online Harms”, there is no evidence that this is happening in practice.

I would be pleased to provide more information on this matter if it would be helpful to do so.

June 2020

¹ Online Harms White Paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper>

² <https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/?page=1&perPage=20>

³ Appendix to our submission: <https://hackinginquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Hacked-Off-Appendix.pdf>