

Proposed acquisition of Sky by Twenty-First Century Fox
Supplementary submission to Competition and Markets Authority: a response to David Elstein

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1. I note Mr David Elstein's personal references to me in the transcript of the CMA roundtable discussion on Media Plurality.¹ These are factually incorrect.
2. In respect of the House of Lords select committee report on Media Ownership, published in 2008, he refers to me as "the researcher for the House of Lords". This is wrong. I was engaged as one of two specialist advisers to the committee for that specific inquiry, under the chairmanship of Lord Fowler.
3. In that capacity, I accompanied a committee delegation on their fact-finding mission to Washington and New York to meet a number of media owners and senior editors, including Rupert Murdoch. The full minutes of all those meetings were published as an appendix to the committee's report.²
4. Mr Elstein suggests that I had "a sense of humour failure" in respect of an important statement by Mr Murdoch describing his relationship with Sky News ("nobody at Sky News listens to me"). I appreciate that Mr. Elstein would wish to dismiss evidence that does not suit his contentious assertion that Rupert Murdoch has always been able to dictate to Sky News.
5. It is, however, a complete misreading of a meeting at which Mr. Elstein was not present. Mr Murdoch's comment, to which many commentators have rightly attached some significance in the context of this bid, was a serious response to a serious question.
6. It was recorded in a minute of the meeting – without any attribution to any member of the committee – which was then seen and formally approved by Mr Murdoch himself. Given the clear relevance of that response to issues of ownership and control, the select committee could reasonably expect any comment made in jest to have been corrected or deleted before being approved. It was not.
7. In that context, it is perhaps worth repeating a statement from my earlier submission: that it would clearly have been nonsensical for Mr. Murdoch to suggest that "nobody listens" at his newspapers where he has complete control and routinely picks up the phone to editors. This statement was of a different order.
8. I would be grateful if this statement could be published as a correction of the errors in Mr Elstein's oral evidence.

Steven Barnett
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¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a02fa95e5274a0ee5a1f157/media-plurality-roundtable-discussion-hearing-transcript.pdf> p56, lines 16 and 19.

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldcomuni/122/122i.pdf> pp111-139