

(Chumko, A., 2023)

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RNZ editing scandal result of 'longstanding operational issues' - minister

André Chumko • 15:01, Jun 21 2023

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Serious questions are being asked about RNZ's editorial practices after [online readers](#) on Friday, June 9, noticed a [Reuters wire story](#) about the invasion of Ukraine had been edited to include [Russian propaganda](#).

RNZ digital reporter Michael Hall was immediately stood down and the public broadcaster began an audit of its wire stories after pro-Kremlin edits were found in more than a dozen articles, causing chief executive Paul Thompson to [order an external review](#).

On Monday, June 12, Thompson apologised to the public for allowing the misinformation to be published, saying senior staff were in the process of auditing thousands of wire stories for inaccurate edits.

Thompson said the edits were a "serious breach" of RNZ's editorial standards and "really disappointing". He said an independent investigation would be held to determine how the breach occurred.

Meanwhile, the digital journalist at the heart of the scandal, Michael Hall, said he was [unaware of any wrongdoing](#), telling Checkpoint he'd edited "that way" for years at RNZ without ever being queried.

On Wednesday, June 14, the [board announced](#) media law expert Willy Akel would chair the external investigation into RNZ's editorial practices, joined by public law expert and former journalist Linda Clark and former director of editorial standards at the ABC Alan Sunderland.

RNZ board chairperson Jim Mather said the investigation would be wide-ranging and the media organisation faced a "massive challenge" to win back the public's confidence.

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The schedule for the investigation is unclear, but should provide some meaty content when released. These are the terms of reference as announced by the RNZ board:

1. To review the circumstances around the inappropriate editing of wire stories discovered in June 2023, identify what went wrong, and recommend areas for improvement. This includes reviewing the handling of the [complaint to the broadcasting minister from the Ukrainian community](#) in October 2022.
2. To review the editorial controls, systems, and processes for the editing of online content at RNZ, assess their effectiveness, and recommend improvements.
3. To review RNZ editorial policy and practice and recommend improvements based on any relevant findings.
4. To advise the board on options for ensuring RNZ has processes in place to safeguard against misinformation or partiality in its news and current affairs content.
5. To advise the board on any other related matters that warrant further consideration.

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