

BBC NEWS COVERAGE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

STATEMENT BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

We are grateful to Lord Wilson and the members of his Independent Panel for devoting so much of their own time to assessing the BBC's performance of its coverage of the European Union and for producing a serious and thoughtful report.

We commissioned this report, together with the MORI research into public perceptions, as part of the Governors' series of impartiality reviews of subjects where the BBC's performance is often questioned. However, in line with our new governance arrangements, this is the first review to be conducted outside the BBC management chain and the first to be published in full.

We are pleased that the Panel found no evidence of deliberate bias in the BBC's coverage of EU matters. That said, we note the Panel's conclusion that "there is a widespread perception that the BBC suffers from certain forms of cultural and unintentional bias" and that "the BBC's coverage of EU news needs to be improved and to be made more demonstrably impartial".

In *Building Public Value* the BBC made clear that one of its core public purposes is to supporting informed democracy by providing trusted and impartial news and information that helps citizens make sense of the world. On the evidence of the MORI research that informed the Panel's report, the BBC is not succeeding in providing basic accessible information on the topic of Europe and urgent action is needed.

As Governors we represent the public interest and have a duty to ensure that the BBC meets that interest in the services it provides. We know that BBC News, led by its new Director Helen Boaden, is passionate about delivering a news service that is independent, impartial and accurate and that commands the confidence of licence payers. Indeed, implementation of the Neil Committee's recommendations is well advanced and some of the issues raised in the Panel's report about training and the role of programme editors are already being addressed.

We have asked BBC management to submit to us their response to the Independent Panel's report and the Panel's detailed recommendations by the end of February. The Board of Governors will publish BBC management's response together with our decision on what action is necessary for BBC News to improve its coverage of Europe and an implementation plan.

Ends.

Notes to Editors

1. Independent Panel Members

Chair: Lord Wilson of Dinton (Richard). Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge since 2002; Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service 1998 – 2002; Permanent Secretary to the Home Office 1994-1997; Non executive Director of Sky.

Lucy Armstrong. Chief Executive of the Alchemists, providing consultancy and venture capital in the North East.

Rodney Leach. Director Jardine Matheson since 1997; Chairman Business for Sterling since 1997; Author of *Europe: a concise encyclopaedia of the European Union*.

Nigel Smith. Managing Director, David Auld Valves Ltd, Glasgow until 2004; Chairman, the No-euro Campaign 2002-2004; Chairman of the Scottish Parliament Referendum Campaign for Yes vote 1997; Commissioner Scottish Constitutional Commission 1993–4.

Sir Stephen Wall. Principal Adviser to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster 2004; Head of European Secretariat, Cabinet Office 2000 – 2004; Ambassador to UKREP 1995 – 2000; Board member of Britain in Europe.

2. Terms of Reference

To assess the impartiality of BBC coverage of the EU with particular regard to:

- Debate about Britain's place in Europe
- The activities of EU institutions
- Accessibility

and to make recommendations for improvement where necessary.

3. The report is in four parts – all have been published in full:

- The Independent Panel's report and recommendations
- A qualitative research report to assess the views of the audience commissioned from MORI: *The EU – Perceptions of the BBC's Reporting*
- Content analysis of two separate weeks of mainstream BBC output, carried out by John Morrison, of Morrison Media Consultants
- Written submissions to the Independent Panel