

**CASE NO: 3865**

**RULING BY THE NEW ZEALAND MEDIA COUNCIL ON THE COMPLAINT OF CHRIS RENNIE AND CHRIS  
POOK AGAINST THE NEW ZEALAND HERALD**

**FINDING: NOT UPHELD**

**TO BE PUBLISHED ON THE NZ MEDIA COUNCIL WEBSITE ON 22 JUNE 2026**

*Confidential to the parties until that date*

### **Overview**

1. Mr Chris Rennie and Dr Chris Pook, separately complain about an article headed, **Puberty blocker ban: What it could mean for transgender teens and their families in New Zealand**, published by the New Zealand Herald on 22 March 2026. These complaints will be considered together as they are similar, both alleging breaches of Principles (1) Accuracy, Fairness and Balance and (4) Comment and Fact. Dr Pook additionally complains about content breaching Principle (6) Headlines and Captions.

### **The Article**

2. Ahead of the outcome of the judicial review of a ban on the prescription of puberty blockers in New Zealand, this article reports on what a possible ban or restriction could mean for transgender teenagers and their families.
3. The Government proposed a policy change to ban new prescriptions of puberty blockers from December 2025. The Professional Association for Trans Health Aotearoa (PATHA) filed an urgent injunction. This was granted, stopping the regulations from coming in to play and setting a date for a judicial review of the matter in May 2026.
4. Justice Wilkinson-Smith, in her interim judgement, said there were enough concerns about the Government’s decision to justify a full judicial review, including questions about why it appeared to go against Ministry of Health advice. She also said there was an arguable case that the restrictions could be discriminatory because puberty blockers are still allowed for other medical conditions but not for treating gender dysphoria or gender incongruence.
5. The article profiles a transgender young person, Zoe, and includes comments from their caregiver, Julia, describing how access to puberty blockers supported Zoe through she/her transition, and the difficulties they believe Zoe may have faced without that treatment.
6. Concerns are raised about puberty blockers from the findings of the 2024 UK Cass Review and a call from Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora for more research to “help us understand the specific needs of gender-dysphoric adolescents in New Zealand.” It is noted that debate over the treatment has increased in recent years, with questions raised about evidence, safety, and appropriate clinical oversight.

7. The article reports a history of the use of puberty blockers in New Zealand over the last thirty years to treat a range of conditions e.g. cancers, as well as treating children experiencing precocious early on-set puberty. In the last 15 years it has been used to treat gender dysphoria or gender incongruence in children and adolescents.
8. Professor Paul Hofman, a paediatric endocrinologist of the University of Auckland, comments that the use of puberty blockers “hits the pause button”, giving transgender young people time to  
*...psychologically mature and become old enough to make decisions that will have permanent implications for their later body appearance.*
9. He talks about the negative impact for some transgender adolescents when developing secondary sexual characteristics and that for some it can lead to self-harm or suicidal feelings.

### **The Complaints**

10. Both, Mr Rennie, and Dr Pook complain that the article breaches Principle (1) Accuracy, Fairness and Balance which states,  
*Publications should be bound at all times by accuracy, fairness, and balance, and should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers by commission or omission. In articles of controversy or disagreement, a fair voice must be given to the opposition view.*
11. Mr Rennie complains that the article relies on a single anonymised anecdotal account, comments from one supportive clinician, and the views of an advocacy organisation. He says that, on such a highly contested issue, is one-sided and fails to meet the requirement for balance. He says that presenting those perspectives without qualification is misleading and inaccurate.
12. He says that the statements “puberty blockers are reversible” and there is “no effect on fertility” are subject to on-going debate. Both complainants said that to present the statements without qualification is misleading and inaccurate.
13. The *Counting Ourselves* survey, researching the health and well-being of NZ transgender people, is quoted in the article. Mr Rennie says that the survey is not a representative sample and does not establish causation between access to puberty blockers and self-harm and suicidality outcomes. He says that this is a misuse of data and implies causation that is not supported by the evidence.
14. Similarly, Dr Pook complains that the article states without evidence “that gender-dysphoric young people without access to puberty blockers “become suicidal” and that this contravenes guidelines from the Suicide Prevention Action Plan.
15. He also complains that the judicial comments are misleading in reading as if it is established that the Government’s decision was political and to contrary advice which is still before the courts and should be presented as contested.

16. Dr Pook also complains of a lack of balance, citing the article’s reliance on a single personal narrative. He adds that the statement “puberty blockers are reversible” is presented as unqualified fact and that the article draws exclusively on sources sympathetic to the use of puberty blockers.
17. He says the article lacks comment from clinicians or other sources who have concerns about the evidence base supporting claims of reversibility. He also says that stating puberty blockers are reversible fails to distinguish between contested empirical claims and verified facts and therefore is a breach of Principle (4) Comment and Fact.
18. Further on Principle (4), Mr Rennie states “that the article frequently blends anecdote, advocacy, and selective expert opinion in a way that risks presenting them as established fact.” He gives a number of examples of this and says that there is a risk of readers interpreting advocacy and personal testimony as fact and this contravenes Principle (4).
19. Dr Pook says that the article’s use of the subheading “Hitting pause” reinforces the contested characterisation of puberty blockers as simply “pausing” development, without acknowledging that this framing has been contested, breaching Principle (6) Headlines and Captions.
20. In further comments Mr Rennie acknowledges the NZ Herald’s amendments clarifying that the reversibility of puberty blockers is contested and that the judicial commentary was interim, resolving two of his original complaints.

### **The Response**

21. Where Mr Rennie’s and Dr Pook’s complaints overlap, the NZ Herald has provided the same response to both complainants.
22. The day after receiving Mr Rennie’s complaint that the original article said puberty blockers were reversible, the NZ Herald made an amendment adding further comment to clarify that the claim of reversibility is disputed, particularly by the Cass Review.
23. At this time, the NZ Herald also added comment to clarify that Justice Wilkinson-Smith’s judgement “was interim and has triggered a full judicial review.”
24. The NZ Herald notified Mr Rennie of these changes on 27 April and Dr Pook on 13 April, advising that both amendments were noted at the bottom of the article.
25. In response to both complainants on the issue of balance, the NZ Herald says the article is not intended as an explainer on the long-running debate over puberty blockers but is focused on the judicial review challenging the ban on their use and on the lived experience of a trans woman. However, the article contains a substantial section outlining concerns raised by independent reviews of gender medicine, particularly the Cass Review, and quotes Health NZ’s acknowledgement of the “dearth and poor quality of evidence on this issue”.

26. They say this is a long-running debate and that not every angle can be covered in every report. They also note that they have since published an opinion piece that more closely reflects the arguments highlighted by the complainants.
27. The NZ Herald stands by the reputation of Professor Paul Hofman, of the University of Auckland, who is quoted in the article as saying that,  
*“Hitting the pause button on puberty allows transgender young people to have time to ‘psychologically mature and become old enough to make decisions that will have permanent implications for their later body appearance.’”*
- They say that Professor Hofman, a paediatric endocrinologist at the University of Auckland, was recommended to them by the Science Media Centre, as an unbiased expert on this topic.
28. They say that the amendment of the original statement,  
*Puberty blockers are reversible,*  
to *Puberty blockers have long been thought of as fully reversible, although this was disputed by the Cass Review, which said the claim that there were no lasting negative effects was lacking evidence.* addresses both complainants’ concerns about the long-term impact of puberty blocker use and its consideration in the article, including in the statements made by Professor Hofman.
29. Responding to Mr Rennie’s complaint that readers could be misled by the anecdotes and comments of the transwoman and young person, the NZ Herald say it is clear that the quotes from Julia and Zoe are their opinions and that all quotes are attributed appropriately.
30. The NZ Herald refutes Mr Rennie’s claims questioning the validity of the “Counting Ourselves” survey and says the report does not purport to establish causation i.e. linking transgender experience to self-harm and suicidal ideology, and that no reasonable reader would interpret it as doing so.
31. The *Hitting pause* sub-heading in the body of the article is clearly in reference to Professor Hofman’s following comments in the text and is in no way confusing to the audience says the NZ Herald.

### **Discussion**

32. Both Mr Rennie and Dr Pook complain that the original article stated that puberty blockers were reversible, despite this being a matter of ongoing debate. Within a day of receiving the first complaint, the NZ Herald amended the article to note that the reversibility of puberty blockers is disputed. Mr Rennie acknowledged that the amendment addressed his concerns, and the Media Council is satisfied that the revised wording recognises the differing views and ongoing debate regarding the long-term effects of puberty blockers. This finding addresses the complaints concerning the reversibility of puberty blockers raised under Principle (1), as well as Dr Pook’s related complaint under Principle (4).

33. Both complainants say that the article lacks balance because it relies on a personal account, a clinician supportive of puberty blocker use, and the advocacy group PATHA, without including alternative clinical perspectives. The NZ Herald responds that the article is primarily about the judicial review and the lived experience of a transwoman. It says that, notwithstanding that focus, the article includes substantial reference to independent reviews that identify concerns about the evidence base for puberty blockers.
34. The Media Council recognises the value of personal stories when reporting on social and health issues, including transgender issues, particularly in the context of a proposed ban on the treatment. Personal stories and reporting on any health issues are an important form of journalism.
35. The question is whether, viewed as a whole, the article provided readers with sufficient information to understand the wider debate. The Media Council is satisfied that it did. In addition to the personal accounts and comments from Professor Hofman, the article substantially references independent reviews, notably the Cass Report, which outline concerns about the effects of puberty blockers and the limitations of the existing research. Those references provide readers with important context and ensure the article contains an appropriate degree of balance. Further, transgender rights cover long-running and complex issues: not every detail or view can be covered in every article. Balance can be achieved over time, as the NZ Herald has shown with the column it supplied, which presented another point of view. The complaints relating to balance are therefore not upheld.
36. Mr Rennie makes a related complaint that the personal accounts provided by Julia and Zoe, together with comments from Professor Hofman and PATHA, blur the distinction between opinion and fact, in breach of Principle (4). The Media Council does not agree. The statements are clearly attributed to their respective sources, and readers can readily distinguish between factual reporting and the opinions or experiences being expressed.
37. The Council finds that the comments in the article referencing suicide do not expressly assert that gender dysphoria causes self-harm or suicidal behaviour. Rather, they present a range of observations, experiences, and concerns relating to transgender and gender-diverse young people. Accordingly, the Council does not accept Mr Rennie and Dr Pook's claims that the article states or implies a causal relationship between gender dysphoria and self-harm or suicidality.
38. The Media Council agrees that the information reported from the *Counting Ourselves* survey reflects the experiences of transgender people, and the NZ Herald could expect that the methodology and the data in the report can be trusted.
39. While there is debate over whether puberty blockers have been proven to provide time for reflection and decision-making, as suggested by Professor Hofman's "hitting pause" comment, the Media Council considers the phrase a reasonable sub-heading. It reflects the content that follows and the Council cannot see how it would mislead or confuse readers.

40. The use of puberty blockers remains a complex and highly contested issue. The complexity is compounded by the limited and evolving evidence base, which has contributed to the debate among clinicians, researchers, policymakers, and affected communities. This article provided readers with sufficient information to understand both the personal impact of the proposed ban and the broader concerns surrounding the treatment.

41. The Media Council finds that the article clearly distinguished between factual reporting and attributed opinion, and that the NZ Herald acted promptly to address concerns regarding the reversibility of puberty blockers and the clarification of the judicial comments.

**Decision:** The complaint is not upheld under Principles (1), (4) or (6)

Council members considering the complaint were Hon Raynor Asher (Chair), Hank Schouten, Bernadette Courtney, Tim Watkin, Guy MacGibbon, Scott Inglis, Ben France-Hudson, Judi Jones, Alison Thom, Jo Cribb

Scott Inglis declared a conflict of interest and did not vote