

CBSC Delivers Revised "Money for Nothing" Decision

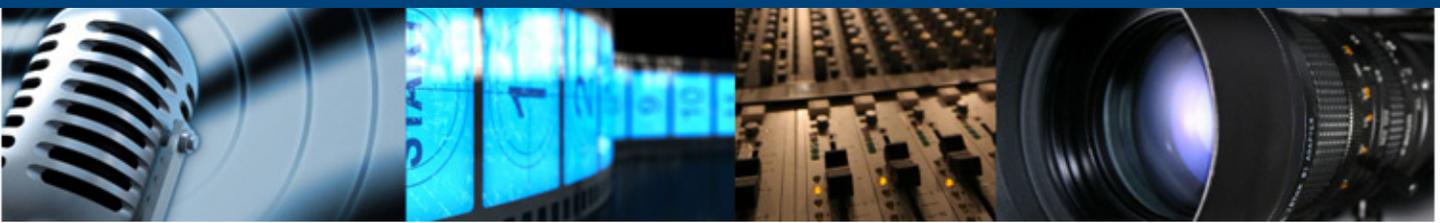
September 6, 2011 by Bob Tarantino

On August 31, 2011, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), the [private body which administers](#) the codes of standards and conduct created by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), [announced](#) its "[revised](#)" [decision](#) in respect of the Dire Straits song "Money for Nothing" (for previous Signal coverage of the CBSC's [original decision](#) and its aftermath, see [here](#) and [here](#)). (One curiosity worth noting: according to the text of "revised" decision, it was apparently decided on May 17, 2011 - it is unclear why the decision was only announced and released three months later.)

To recap: in January 2011 the CBSC released a decision of its Atlantic Regional Panel which, responding to a listener complaint, held that the radio broadcast of the Dire Straits song "Money for Nothing", which contained the word "f****" (artfully called "the other f-word" in the revised decision), violated Clause 2 of the [CAB Code of Ethics](#), and Clauses 2, 7 and 9 of the [CAB Equitable Portrayal Code](#) (all of which counsel against the use of language which is abusive, offensive, derogatory or results in negative portrayal on the basis of, among others, sexual orientation). The Atlantic Regional Panel's decision ignited a negative public reaction, one which was so pronounced that the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) was prompted, after being buried by outraged public complaints, to send a public letter to the CBSC asking them to reconsider the decision - a rather remarkable turn of events, seeing as (a) there is normally no appeal mechanism for CBSC decisions, (b) the CRTC has no formal oversight powers over the CBSC, and (c) the people complaining to the CRTC were evidently confused about precisely to whom they should have been complaining, since the CRTC had nothing to do with the CBSC decision. The CBSC convened what it called an "ad hoc national panel" to reconsider the decision, and that ad hoc panel has now released a "revised" decision, which, to mangle the terminology, "overturns" the earlier Atlantic Regional Panel decision.

Interested readers should peruse two items from the CBSC: both the lengthy [National Panel decision](#) and also the [Press Release about the decision](#) which was released by the CBSC.

To summarize the revised decision: using "the other f-word" in radio broadcasts is, in general, inappropriate and a violation of the Code of Ethics and the Equitable Portrayal Code, however, *in the context of this song*, the use of the word "f****" was acceptable because it was in furtherance of the artistic device of portraying the intolerant, bigoted individual from whose perspective the lyrics of the song are being sung; all that being said, because there are numerous alternative versions of the song which have been released by the band and which do not make use of "the other f-word", those alternative versions are to be preferred, but broadcasting the original, unexpurgated version of the song will not, in itself, be a violation of the applicable Codes.



And so ends one of the more exciting episodes in the CBSC's history (assuming that another new, previously unknown appeal mechanism is not devised). It strikes me that the revised decision is the preferable of the two, though the entire saga hopefully highlights the deficiencies of the existing process and demonstrates the need for an internal appeal/review device within the existing CBSC framework.

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