Sky New Zealand yanks Sky Australia after Christchurch footage sparks outrage

When news broke of the mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand that left at least 49 dead Thursday evening, I started watching Twitter. Two surprising themes stood out: people urging their social media followers to protect themselves from accidentally watching an extremely graphic 17-minute video of the attack — and separately, New Zealand and Australian locals condemning local channel Sky News Australia from *intentionally* sharing parts of that same footage with their viewers.

"We stand in support of our fellow New Zealanders"
Now, broadcaster Sky New Zealand has taken the drastic step of removing Sky News Australia from their broadcasts over the air. "We stand in support of our fellow New Zealanders and have made the decision to remove Sky News Australia from our platform until we are confident that the distressing footage from yesterday's events will not be shared," Sky NZ wrote in a since-deleted tweet, archived by *BuzzFeed.*

Sky NZ later changed its message drastically, stating that the network is simply "working with our colleagues" at Sky News Australia "to ensure coverage doesn't compromise ongoing investigations," and suggesting that it was a joint decision *with* Sky News Australia to pull coverage off the air.

> *We stand in support of our fellow New Zealanders and are working with our colleagues at @SkyNewsAust to ensure coverage doesn't compromise ongoing investigations in NZ. We made the decision on Friday with Sky News Australia to replace their live news with sport.*

> *— SKY New Zealand (@SKYNZ) March 16, 2019*

But that doesn't line up with statements from a Sky New Zealand spokesperson to the *New Zealand Herald*, which were along the lines of the original tweet: "We made the decision to remove Sky News Australia from our platform while disturbing footage of the shootings was being shown to avoid causing any distress to our viewers. It will remain off air until we are confident the footage won't be shared."

The change in messaging is especially weird because as far as I can tell, the two Skys aren't exactly colleagues. Sky News Australia was a part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp empire as of 2016, and is still listed as such on News Corp Australia's brands page — whereas News Corp sold off its stake in New Zealand's Sky Network Television in 2013. Perhaps there was a later acquisition that wasn't widely covered, however?

New Zealand Police said yesterday evening they had been doing everything in their power to scrub footage of the terrorist attack from the internet — a very difficult task — and reminded citizens today that in New Zealand, distributing an "objectionable publication" is a crime:

> *We would also like to remind the public that it is an offence to distribute an objectionable publication and that is punishable by imprisonment.*
>
> *Once again I want to reassure the public that a large Police presence remains in the city for the time being.*
>
> *— New Zealand Police (@nzpolice) March 15, 2019*

A "plain English guide" to that law shows that it carries penalties of up to 14 years in prison, or up to a $200,000 fine for an organization. But that law probably doesn't have anything to do with Sky NZ's decision to pull Sky News Australia off the air, because there appears to be a built-in

exception for broadcasters. (I am not a lawyer.)

The *New Zealand Herald* reports that Sky News Australia's news coverage has been replaced, for now, with Fox Sports instead.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/16/18268213/sky-new-zealand-yanks-sky-australia-after-christchurch-footage-sparks-outrage