

ABC website outside bounds of review

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Stories published on the ABC website are not covered by the broadcaster's code of practice and are beyond the investigative powers of the Australian Broadcasting Authority, a man complaining about the ABC's Middle East coverage has been told.

The ABC's code of practice promises fairness and balance in its television and radio broadcasting, and its new complaints system offers a detailed structure for viewers and listeners who feel the standards have not been met.

"Unfortunately the ABC's code of practice does not address the issue of material placed on its website," the Australian Broadcasting Authority told Melbourne man Jacob Wajsbort last week.

The ABA has since expanded its advice, saying it does not have the power to investigate any news websites, regardless of whether they are covered by codes of practice.

Mr Wajsbort's Melbourne-based group, identifying itself as the International Committee for Jewish Solidarity, has been pur-

suing the ABC over its claims of systemic anti-Israel bias in the broadcaster's Middle East reporting.

The group's spokesman, Ralph Zwier, said the ABA's advice exposed a problem with the complaints process.

"I'm concerned because the ABC constantly in its literature says to us, 'if you're not satisfied with our finding, you can go to the ABA'," he said.

He said the complaints procedure was a "complaints rejection procedure".

Mr Zwier's group has had its complaints about anti-Israeli bias rejected by the ABC's formal process (which has also simultaneously rejected a separate complaint of pro-Israeli bias).

A spokesman for the ABC said that while the code of practice referred specifically only to radio and television reports, the broadcaster regarded ABC Online as subject to the same journalistic rules. He said some clarification might be needed of the broadcaster's independent complaints review procedure to ensure that it applied to online content.