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ADJUDICATION NO: 16/A/2026

NAME OF PROGRAMME: POKER FACE SONG BY LADY GAGA

DATE AND TIME OF BROADCAST: 15 April 2026, approximately 7h00 &
20 April 2026, 15h10.

BROADCASTER: EAST COAST RADIO

COMPLAINANT: BROOM

COMPLAINT

Complaint that a radio station played an unedited song during times that a large number of children are likely to be in the audience. The song contained the f-word.

APPLICABLE CLAUSE

Clause 6 Children

- (11) No excessively or grossly offensive language should be used before the watershed period on television or at times when a large number of children are likely to be part of the audience on television or radio.

ADJUDICATION

- [1] A complaint was lodged with the BCCSA against East Coast Radio for broadcasting a song containing an allegedly offensive word at 7.55 during the East Coast Breakfast show on 15 April at 7:00, and again on 20 April 2026 at

15:00.

[2] The complaint reads as follows:

"I have twice heard ECR play the original, unedited version of Lady Gaga Poker Face this month. The chorus repeatedly says "f@%k her face".

This was on Darren Mauls show (not sure of the date) and also on 20 April at 15h10.

I reported it the East Coast Radio on their WhatsApp line, but was ignored.

"No excessively or grossly offensive language should be used before the watershed period on television or at times when a large number of children are likely to be part of the audience on television or radio."

The unedited Lady Gaga Poker Face song played twice in recent times, which has incredibly obscene lyrics.

15 April 2026, approximately 7h00. Children in the car with me.

20 April 2026, 15h10.

Quote from the lyrics (I have edited the swear word) of the chorus, which is repeated about 12 times during the song:

P-p-p-poker face, f-f-f@%k her face (mum-mum-mum-mah)

Apart from the above obviously obscene lyrics, the rest of the song is also full of sexual innuendo.

The song was written after Lady Gaga used to fantasize about women while being intimate with her BF

I informed them on the WhatsApp line on 15 April. No response, and then it was still played again.

Contacted them again after the second time, still no response. Maybe you'll have better luck."

[3] The Broadcaster responded as follows:

"Thank for the email and for sharing Mr Broom's concerns with us.

We also acknowledge that his WhatsApp was received after checking the system, but due to the sheer volume of WhatsApps received on a daily basis, unfortunately it wasn't flagged timeously given that the WhatsApp line is not dedicated for complaints.

We ask all listeners on our website to use bccsa@nabsa.co.za as the complaints route, or to call the station on 031 570 9495 to be directed to the correct department.

We apologise for missing the communication from Mr Broom.

We have reviewed the song in question as raised by Mr Broom. We do not believe that the foul language used was explicit and also the version played was rated as a 'radio version'.

However, having reviewed the song, we have decided to remove the song immediately from our playlist. I have attached the audio from the 15th of April. The second date given (20 April), the song was not scheduled so audio is unavailable.

We appreciate the time taken by Mr Broom to bring this to our attention and hopefully the matter has been resolved.”

[4] The Complainant replied as follows:

“Thank you for the feedback. They definitely used the original version (not radio friendly).

Their brain may be trained to hear differently, but if you listen properly and know what she's saying, you hear it clearly. My sister in law also heard it and was equally surprised. Can you send me the recording they sent please? Did you listen for yourself?

I don't accept their response as they have not accepted that the version with the curse words was played. The snippet is only for part of the song, but if you listen to the last ten seconds it can clearly be heard that she says "p p p poker face, fuh fuh fu%& her face".”

EVALUATION

[5] In applying Clause 6.11 to the lyrics of a song, the main questions that usually arise are whether the content may be harmful or disturbing to children, and whether the language used may be classified as excessive or grossly offensive.

[6] I listened to the impugned song and noted the following:

The song has a catchy tune and rhythmic beat, which contribute significantly to its popularity. The tune and beat are dominant features of the listening experience. The lyrics, as sung by the artist, are indistinct, and the f-word is extremely fleeting and barely audible. The words flow into one another, requiring repeated and attentive listening in order to discern their meaning.

[7] Only after carefully listening to the song and following the lyrics on hard copy was I able to agree with the Complainant that the content is suggestive in nature and contains sexual innuendos. Sexual innuendos, however, typically convey a double meaning and allude to sexual themes without addressing them directly. Words such as “hot” and “wet” are commonly used in this context. Innuendos rely

on the listener's ability to read between the lines in order to grasp the intended meaning. Younger children generally lack the mature insight and adult frame of reference necessary to understand such implied meanings. Importantly, the impugned song contains no explicit descriptions of sexual acts.

- [8] Clause 6 applies specifically in circumstances where a large number of children are likely to form part of the audience. Although statistics relating to child listenership are not readily available, East Coast Radio is a music-driven lifestyle station that broadcasts adult contemporary music. Its target audience consists primarily of adults between the ages of 25 and 49, and its programming is not specifically directed at children.
- [9] Although children may form part of the audience at any time of day, it is unlikely that many children listen attentively to radio content or focus on every word of a song. Where children are part of a captive audience, such as while travelling to school in a motor vehicle, they are likely to be secondary listeners. In other words, their attention is not fully directed at the radio and they are probably engaged in other activities. Children and teenagers generally focus primarily on the tune and beat of a song rather than its lyrical content. This is especially true of younger children, since a deeper appreciation of lyrical nuance, wordplay, and sexual connotation requires a level of maturity and adult contextual understanding that they generally do not possess. Given how indistinct the f-word was in this instance, it is doubtful whether teenagers would have heard it at all, particularly in light of the extent to which their attention is often occupied by their cell phones.
- [10] The Complainant contends that the song contained "*incredibly obscene lyrics*". Obscene lyrics refer to language regarded as extremely offensive, indecent, or disgusting according to prevailing community standards. Although the f-word may be regarded as offensive and was historically considered derogatory, contemporary usage suggests that it has, to a significant extent, lost its pejorative force and has become incorporated into modern urban colloquial language.

- [11] The Complainant is adamant that the version broadcast was not the radio-edited version of the song. The Broadcaster, however, submitted that the version broadcast had been classified as a “radio version”. I listened to two versions of the song, namely an unedited version and a radio-edited version. The difference between the two is hardly perceivable. The Complainant’s cropped version of the song cannot be considered since that is not how the song was broadcast.
- [12] Marshall McLuhan’s well-known statement that “the medium is the message” conveys the idea that the medium itself influences the manner in which a message is perceived and received. Song lyrics are not intended to be read in isolation from the accompanying musical arrangement, but rather to be experienced as an integral part of the song as a whole. When lyrics are read independently, divorced from the musical context, their impact and potential shock value may be amplified. This complaint concerns the broadcast of a song, not the recitation of a poem on radio or the reading of lyrics in hard copy.
- [13] I have also considered the broader context surrounding the broadcast, including the media-saturated environment in which both adults and children live, and the reality that children are frequently exposed through advertising, social media, and other platforms to material of which parents may disapprove — however regrettable this may be. It must be borne in mind that the purpose of the Code is not to censor all sensitive material to which children may potentially be exposed, nor to interfere unduly with the editorial discretion of broadcasters, including decisions relating to music selection. Rather, the Code seeks to maintain an appropriate balance between the rights of broadcasters, on the one hand, and the rights and interests of audiences, on the other. In most instances, parents and caregivers retain the ability to switch off the radio or tune to another station.
- [14] Judged within the overall context of the broadcast — namely a contemporary radio station targeting an adult audience — I conclude that the lyrics of the song do not constitute a contravention of Clause 6.11 of the Code as the words cannot

be categorised as “excessively and grossly offensive”. Accordingly, **no contravention of the Code could be found, and the complaint is not upheld.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Venter', with a horizontal line underneath.

DR LINDA VENTER
COMMISSIONER: BROADCASTING COMPLAINTS COMMISSION