

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION

Claim No. KB-2023-000965

Media and Communications List
Before Mr Justice Griffiths

Between:-

CHRIS PACKHAM CBE

Claimant

-and-

(1) FIELDSPORTS CHANNEL LIMITED
(2) ANDREW O'ROURKE

Defendants

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Carol Day, Claimant's Representative

1. My [Lord], in this action for defamation, I appear on behalf of the Claimant, Mr Chris Packham CBE. Ellen Roberts appears on behalf of the First Defendant, Fieldsports Channel Limited, and the Second Defendant, Mr Andrew (Ben) O'Rourke.
2. The Claimant is a well-known naturalist, nature photographer, television presenter and author. He has spent much of his life campaigning on environmental protection and conservation, and animal welfare, issues. His campaigns receive significant support from all sections of society, including rural communities. However, regrettably, the Claimant regularly receives threats from those who oppose his campaigns, including death threats.
3. In 2019, the Claimant's not-for-profit organisation, Wild Justice, successfully challenged the UK government's granting of General Licences to shoot certain

species of wild bird. This led to a spike in abuse against the Claimant, and in April 2019, the Claimant spoke on the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme about a particular death threat he had received in the post.

4. On 1st June 2022, the Defendants published a video and an article on a website and social media channels, alleging that the Claimant had written that death threat letter to himself but had dishonestly claimed that it had been sent to him by an anonymous third party.
5. The Defendants did so without putting the allegation to the Claimant, despite its gravity. The only possible basis for the allegation was spurious handwriting analysis conducted by a purported expert hired by a third party, which has since been comprehensively discredited.
6. The allegation that the Claimant forged and sent to himself a death threat and then lied about it to his family, the police and the public is plainly baseless, and has unsurprisingly caused the Claimant enormous reputational damage and distress. He is astounded that the Defendants published the allegation on such a flimsy evidential basis, and that, until very recently, they had on record a Defence seeking to defend the allegation as true, and as a publication on a matter of public interest.
7. The Claimant has been caused further distress by the Defendants' derisive response to his claim, and in particular the First Defendant's actions in mounting caricatures of his head on its "trophy wall" at the British Shooting Show in February 2023, alongside a head of former prime minister Boris Johnson and a British policeman's helmet. The First Defendant is a prominent organisation within the field sports community. The Claimant has been the victim of arson attacks and has received numerous death threats, and he considers its actions to have been utterly reckless and irresponsible in that context.
8. I can inform the Court that the parties have now agreed to resolve the claim. The Defendants have agreed to pay the Claimant substantial damages and to make a contribution to his legal costs. They have also undertaken never to repeat the allegation complained of, and have agreed to publish the full text of this statement on Fieldsports Channel's platforms.

Ellen Roberts, First Defendant's Representative

9. My [Lord], on behalf of the First Defendant I confirm everything the Claimant's Representative, Carol Day, has said. The Defendant sincerely regrets publishing that the Claimant had forged and sent himself a death threat which it fully accepts is untrue.
10. The First Defendant recognises that it and the Claimant have differing views on nature conservation and wildlife management. It fully accepts, however, that this can never justify publishing baseless and damaging allegations of dishonesty against the Claimant. The First Defendant regrets that it did not conduct any verification of the handwriting report, which would have quickly demonstrated to it the falsity of the allegation, and accepts that it fell well below the standards expected of responsible, impartial journalists.
11. To indicate the sincerity of this apology, the First Defendant has agreed to pay the Claimant substantial damages and to contribute to his legal costs. It has also undertaken never to repeat the allegation complained of, and has agreed to publish the full text of this statement on Fieldsports Channel's platforms.

Ellen Roberts, Second Defendant's Representative

12. My [Lord], on behalf of Ben O'Rourke, the Second Defendant I confirm everything the Claimant's Representative, Carol Day, has said. The Second Defendant sincerely regrets instigating the publication of the article that the Claimant had forged and sent himself a death threat, an allegation that he will not repeat.
13. The Second Defendant accepts that he should not have made the defamatory allegation and regrets causing the Claimant personal damage and distress.

Carol Day, Claimant's Representative

14. My [Lord], given this public apology and the other steps undertaken by the Defendants, the Claimant is content to let the matter rest.