

## **Aftenposten Insight apologises for errors and lack of contradiction in the February edition**

In its February edition, *Aftenposten Insight* published an article on corruption in Iceland. Among other things, the article examined the so-called *Fishrot* case, which involves the Icelandic fishing corporation Samherji. The article gave an imbalanced depiction of the circumstances, failed to give the target of the accusations an opportunity to respond to the accusations [contradiction], and contained a number of inaccuracies.

A failure in [Aftenposten's] internal processes resulted in Samherji, the target of the accusations, not being presented with a contemporaneous opportunity to respond to aspects that directly concerned the company, contrary to fundamental principles of media ethics. The article omitted to mention the editors' unsuccessful attempts to reach Samherji by email. Two enquiries turned out to have been made to a non-existent email address in the Samherji organisation. It is unclear why no delivery failure bounce-back was received in response to these emails. That the article instead referred to the company's own public announcement on the matter was not in any way an acceptable substitute for contradiction.

The article contained a number of assertions, and did not sufficiently signpost that these were the whistleblower Jóhannes Stefánsson's version of events. Nor was it made clear that the matter is under investigation in Iceland and that it [the question of guilt] will not be settled until there is a legally binding judgment or the case is dropped. A handful of individuals are understood to have suspect status in the case, but no individuals in Iceland have been charged. No individuals or companies connected to Samherji is a party to the criminal proceedings in Namibia.

*Aftenposten Insight* does not have any basis for claiming that Stefánsson allegedly "acted on behalf of" Samherji in connection with bribes paid to individuals in Namibia, or that an agreement to that effect had been entered into between Samherji and Namibian persons. These allegations are Stefánsson's own, and the matter of whether he acted on behalf of the company is denied by Samherji and is the subject of the ongoing investigation. This should have been made clear in the article.

A caption in the article stated that Stefánsson leaked the mentioned documents to Wikileaks when he was employed by Samherji. This is incorrect. He left the company in 2016, whereas the leak occurred in 2019.

The article makes a number of references to "the company's bribery agreement" or similar. Samherji's Norwegian counsel, Wikborg Rein, have pointed out to *Aftenposten Insight* that they, in their review of the case, have not seen any documents that would meet this description. Similarly, the prosecuting authority investigating the case in Iceland has not to date uncovered any "bribery agreement".

In the coverage of the administrative fine (erroneously referred to as a penalty) imposed on DNB by the [Norwegian] Financial Supervisory Authority for "significant omissions in compliance with anti-money laundering legislation", it should have been made clear that the fine did not relate to DNB's relationship with Samherji, as the matter was time-barred. In its decision to impose the administrative fine from April 2021, the Financial Supervisory Authority did, however, comment specifically on the [bank's] relationship with Samherji, which according to the authority had "especially long-standing structural shortcomings".

Further, in the article's coverage of payments from DNB accounts, the expression "corruption money" was used, when the occurrence of such behaviour has not been established by a court of law and is subject to ongoing investigation. Samherji also claims that the share of the payments made through

DNB that is regarded as controversial, is far lower than has been stated in the article and in other publications.

The article gives an impression of having knowledge of the company operating "with great profitability" in Namibia's fisheries [sector], but this has not been documented and has not been subject to contradiction.

According to the Icelandic Directorate of Fisheries, Samherji Iceland ehf. holds 8.78 percent of Iceland's fishing quotas. In the article, it is stated that Samherji alone has 24.3 percent of these, and that there is an upper legal limit of 12 percent. The 24.3 figure was erroneously based on a calculation where holdings, positions etc. in other companies had also been taken into account.

The article notes that several Icelandic journalists have been questioned by the police under suspicion of having violated the right to private life, but this questioning was not related to the journalists' coverage of the above mentioned case, and is as such not of relevance [to the matter].

*Aftenposten Insight apologises.*

*Samherji's response to the article will be published in a subsequent edition of Aftenposten Insight.*