

The independent

Sky News admits hacking emails but says it was 'in the public interest'

Rob Williams -Thursday 05 April 2012

Sky News, the British satellite broadcaster, said today that it had hacked into email accounts belonging to members of the public on two separate occasions, but that it had done so in the public interest.

The broadcaster admitted it had accessed the emails of John Darwin, the man who faked his death in a canoeing accident in 2002.

The company also admitted to accessing the emails of a man suspected of being a paedophile, and his wife, although no information was forthcoming from that investigation.

BSkyB, which is 39 per cent owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, said information that it had discovered in accessing Darwin's emails was used in his subsequent prosecution.

Darwin faked his death in a canoeing accident in a bid to claim hundreds of thousands of pounds from insurance policies and pensions.

The couple had managed to convince their two children, police, a coroner, and financial institutions that John Darwin had died in canoeing accident.

The Darwins, who are from Seaton Carew near Hartlepool went to jail in 2008 for the insurance swindle.

A former Sky News managing editor, Simon Cole, had reportedly agreed that Gerard Tubb, the North of England correspondent, could hack into an email account used by Darwin.

But Sky News said their actions were in the public interest and amounted to responsible journalism.

John Ryley, the head of Sky News, said in a statement: "Sky News is committed to the highest editorial standards.

"Like other news organisations, we are acutely aware of the tensions that can arise between the law and responsible investigative journalism.

"On two occasions, we have authorised a journalist to access the email of individuals suspected of criminal activity.

"In the 2008 case of Anne Darwin, Sky News met with Cleveland Police and provided them with emails offering new information relevant to Mrs Darwin's defence.

"Material provided by Sky News was used in the successful prosecution and the police made clear after the trial that this information was pivotal to the case.

"We stand by these actions as editorially justified and in the public interest. We do not take such decisions lightly or frequently.

"They require finely balanced judgment based on individual circumstances and must always be subjected to the proper editorial controls."

Today's revelations come at a particularly sensitive time for Sky News, which is a subsidiary of BSkyB.

Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator is currently determining whether or not News Corp and James Murdoch are 'fit and proper' owners of a broadcasting licence.