



# MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, February 6, 2025

## ABC staff 'disgusted' by handling of Lattouf case

The ABC must commission an independent inquiry into the broadcaster's independence from outside interference and apologise for allowing external pressure to influence the dismissal of Antoinette Lattouf and attempts to have other journalists sacked in recent years.

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance members at the ABC want the inquiry to be conducted within 12 months and the full report released publicly.

Following a union meeting today, they are also demanding complete end to the "special hotlines" that some groups are able to leverage to influence the ABC and improved transparency about complaints and lobbying activities directed at the Chair and managing director.

"Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance members at the ABC are dismayed by the revelations emerging from the Antoinette Lattouf trial and disgusted by the ABC's handling of the case," said the ABC National House Committee.

"The ABC's position that Ms Lattouf has not "demonstrated the existence of a Lebanese, Arab or Middle Eastern race" destroys any hope that the ABC intends to address the systemic racism identified by the Janke review of last year.

"As a public broadcaster, the ABC must act as a model litigant. We demand it immediately disavows this position and acknowledges, without qualification, that Lebanese, Arab and Middle Eastern people can be subject to racial discrimination.

"The trial has confirmed our worst fears: the ABC's independence is not adequately protected. Across successive leaderships, political pressure has influenced the ABC chair, leading to breaches of our independence. There has been no commitment to change from the new leadership.

"It's therefore not enough to change the personnel. The system allowing those breaches needs to be changed.

"ABC staff work tirelessly to build and maintain the ABC's independence and integrity. It is the board's legal duty to protect that independence and integrity. But time and again we see ABC chairs and managing directors do the opposite.

"ABC's staff know social media rules are supposed to ensure the ABC isn't brought into disrepute, yet this court proceeding has badly harmed the ABC's reputation.

"This must stop. We demand changes be made to ensure it does.

*The full resolution follows on the next page.*

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 📞 1300 656 513

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## **Resolution**

ABC MEAA members demand:

1. An explicit acceptance by the ABC that they will not require any proof that it is possible to be racist to a Lebanese/Arab/Middle Eastern person and an apology for making that argument in court.
2. An independent inquiry, designed in collaboration with the ABC MEAA National House Committee, to examine the ABC's independence and how outside pressure may have inappropriately influenced the ABC, including the attempts to sack Emma Alberici and Andrew Probyn, revealed in 2018, and the sacking of Antoinette Lattouf. Since these cases appear to demonstrate inappropriate outside influence despite personnel changes across successive leadership teams, the inquiry should consider potential legislative, corporate culture or policy changes that might be required, as well as changing or clarifying the roles of the Chair and managing director, to better protect the ABC's integrity and independence. The inquiry should be conducted within 12 months and a full report be released publicly.
3. A full apology to Antoinette Lattouf, ABC staff and the public for allowing external pressure to influence the ABC, undermining the ABC's independence and hard-won trust.
4. An acknowledgement from Chair Kim Williams that what occurred before his time with the sacking of Lattouf was unacceptable and a commitment to stop it happening again.
5. A complete end to the "special hotlines" that some groups are able to leverage to influence the ABC. All complaints received by senior executives, the MD or the board must be directed to the ombudsman or appropriate adjudicator with no further action. The ABC should follow its established and rigorous complaints handling process through the Ombudsman's Office without interference or influence from management. Editorial staff subject to complaints must always be afforded the right to respond before any adverse findings or actions are taken against them.
6. Improved transparency around attempts to influence including the Managing Director and Chair publishing their diaries and summaries of all complaints and lobbying actions received by them.
7. That the incoming MD Hugh Marks meets with the MEAA National House Committee to openly and collaboratively discuss how to ensure these longstanding problems are not repeated.
8. That the ABC does not unduly fold to bad faith external media campaigns.
9. ABC Management will immediately work with ABC MEAA House Committee to review and implement social media policy with transparency.
10. Call on the ABC management to treat staff's mental health disclosures with respect in all circumstances, and recognise the mental health toll of working in the media industry.

**Media Contact: Mark Phillips, 0422 009 011**