

Former SBS newsreader Lee Lin Chin says she left broadcaster due to ‘mistreatment of staff’

Decision to publicly rebuke SBS management follows revelations by other former staffers that they suffered racism in the workplace

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Former SBS newsreader Lee Lin Chin has told the Guardian she left the broadcaster after 30 years as she believed there were systemic issues in the workplace including a lack of diversity in management. Photograph: George Fetting

The former SBS newsreader Lee Lin Chin has confirmed she resigned from SBS after 30 years in 2018 because she was unhappy with management’s treatment of staff and the corporate direction of the multicultural broadcaster.

Chin’s decision to publicly rebuke SBS management follows revelations by other former SBS staffers this month that they had suffered racism and toxicity in the workplace.

Chin, who was born in Singapore, told Guardian Australia she did not suffer from racist attitudes at SBS, but believed there were systemic workplace issues at the broadcaster, including a lack of diversity in management.

In a 2018 letter to then SBS chairman Hass Dellal, obtained by Guardian Australia, Chin said the “lack of consideration and common human respect” for SBS staff had made her so unhappy she quit before her contract was up.

“My reasons for arriving at this difficult decision is the general unhappiness at the style of management of the network, the culture resulting from it, the mistreatment of staff

in the lack of consideration and common human respect, as well as the direction SBS is moving,” Chin wrote to Dellal, asking the chairman for a meeting.

Dellal expressed surprise at her reason for resigning, saying he believed staff satisfaction reviews were “exceptionally positive”.

A spokesman for SBS said the chairman had twice requested to meet Chin after her email, but she did not respond.

“As stated at the time of her departure, SBS respected Lee Lin’s decision at the time to leave SBS to pursue other commercial opportunities, and wished her well in those endeavours,” the spokesman said.

“In relation to the correspondence – SBS Chairman Dr Hass Dellal AO twice invited Lee Lin to meet with him to discuss her email, including over the phone if preferred. Lee Lin did not respond to those invitations. As such there were no specific allegations which could be investigated.”

In her last few years at SBS, Chin had branched out into performing comic segments for The Feed, took part in Eurovision Song Contest coverage and was the first SBS personality to be nominated for a Gold Logie in 2016.

Chin’s departure from the network where she had presented the 6.30pm World News on Saturdays and Sundays since 1988, was framed by the network as the retirement of “one of SBS’s most beloved identities” and “one of Australia’s most recognisable and respected newsreaders”.

But her departure was shrouded in mystery, especially after she said on Twitter she had not retired, but was “simply not reading the news on SBS any more”.

Chin told Guardian Australia the issues raised in her resignation letter had not been resolved since her departure.

“It is deeply dispiriting that the misrule at the network continues to thrive unchecked, unexamined,” Chin said.

“Only the glare of exposure would put an end to this unhappy state of affairs. One hopes.”

Chin said she was publicly confirming her reasons for leaving to support current and former SBS staff who had complained of bullying, racism and a lack of diversity at the network.

She did only a few interviews when she resigned, but hinted in one local paper interview that she was concerned by the creeping commercialism of SBS, which began running commercials in ad breaks in programs in 2006.

“It’s easy to point to the change in management culture as beginning when advertising was permitted by the government,” Chin told CityHub.

“We produced quality and adventurous output because we weren’t constrained by advertisers and we were primarily concerned with observing the charter and being an alternative to the mainstream.”

The current SBS managing director, James Taylor, was brought in shortly after Chin’s departure. Taylor recently promised to review the network’s hiring and policies to ensure inclusivity, but his predecessor, Michael Ebeid, has argued the broadcaster’s all-white executive is not a problem as long as the content is diverse.

A spokesman for SBS said the diversity and inclusion initiatives announced a fortnight ago were in the process of being implemented across the organisation, including the immediate appointment of two new directors to the executive leadership team.

Chin, whose fashion sense grabbed attention, wore a perspex Commes des Garçons outfit for her final news broadcast on 29 July 2018. She was replaced by Anton Enus on the weekend bulletin.