

## SBS staff urge leadership change as former journalists air claims of racism

*Exclusive: staff write to the board, as managing director separately says he was 'sickened' to read of racist treatment of Indigenous reporters*

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*SBS staff want its management to more accurately represent its multicultural remit. Photograph: Ryan Pierse/Getty Images*

SBS staff have pleaded with the board to appoint someone other than a white Anglo man as news director to reflect the station's multicultural charter.

Since 1978 the director of news has always been a white man, with the exception of Irene Buschtedt between 1993 and 1995.

With the retirement of veteran news director Jim Carroll due in December, having been in the post since 2013, staff say the board should seize the opportunity to make a cultural change.

The letter, seen by Guardian Australia, says: "As a multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander broadcaster, the appointment of the next director of news should be an opportunity and not a blind spot.

"We ask that the board of directors take this opportunity to reflect on SBS's charter and aspirations as a world leading broadcaster and advocate for a candidate drawn from Australia's multicultural and diverse communities."

On Tuesday the station's managing director, James Taylor, responded to claims from former Indigenous staff that they experienced racism when working at the broadcaster.

Screenwriter Kodie Bedford said on Twitter that when she got a cadetship at SBS in 2008, she was always introduced as "the Indigenous cadet journalist" and suffered from "micro-aggressions, forms of paternalism and racism" from a colleague.

Beginning a long Twitter thread, she said the experience had taken her a long time to get over.

"I still carry trauma and feel sick about it. Colleagues have been sharing their story and I'm adding my voice. We need to change the system."

Taylor told staff he was "sickened and saddened" to read Bedford's post and it was abhorrent that an institution "that so visibly lives the standards of inclusion" was a place where racism in the workplace had been evident.

"As I have said to all SBS team members today, I am committed to a culture that stands opposed to any form of racism or exclusion," Taylor told Guardian Australia.

"It can take many overt and less overt forms, none of which are acceptable. Racism is abhorrent and we are committed to ensuring it has no place at SBS."

Other former SBS staffers responded to Bedford by saying that they too suffered racism in the workplace.

The Indigenous journalist Allan Clarke, who worked at the ABC and BuzzFeed, said he witnessed the racism Kodie was subjected to, and experienced it himself.

"I worked alongside her and watched her go from a confident young reporter to hitting rock bottom," Clarke said on Twitter. "The racism Kodie, myself and our Aboriginal colleagues were subjected to was horrific. Those toxic years damaged us and left scars."

The presenter of Guardian Australia's Full Story podcast, Laura Murphy-Oates, said she experienced racism when she worked at SBS.

Taylor, who is a member of an almost exclusively white executive at the broadcaster, told staff the "diversity of our people across the organisation is one of our greatest strengths".

He said that management was reviewing its data collection practices and policies to ensure they were identifying and addressing racism, particularly in exit interviews.

**The real bullies who spread hatred and division aren't on Twitter – they're in plain sight**

Journalist Antoinette Lattouf, a director of Media Diversity Australia, said Taylor's email needed to result in meaningful change, and revealed she had also been subjected to racism at SBS.

“I started my career at SBS 15 years ago,” the Network Ten journalist said. “And I left SBS after being quite viciously bullied.

“This impacted me for years and still makes me feel sick when I encounter that person or hear similar stories from the next generation of CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] journalists.

“I have never spoken publicly about my experience, because I felt if you already were a woman and person of colour, the odds were stacked against you. And you had to work smarter and harder to survive.”

The national house committee told the board the workforce should reflect the society from which it is drawn and that the organisation should continue to look for ways to enhance its diversity and inclusion practice.

Lattouf said the structural barriers that prohibit Indigenous people and people of colour from thriving needed to be addressed and that it was “gobsmacking” that the SBS executive was “almost 100% white”.

“While I commend the acknowledgement of racism and problems within the institution of SBS, for too long and across all media outlets there have been pledges to do better about diversity and inclusion, but that is kind of where it stops,” she said.

However, Lattouf said SBS still did better than other news outlets – including newspapers – in representing the demographics and racial diversity of the Australian population.

“While there is obviously more public interest and criticism of the public broadcasters, it is important to note that they are doing demonstrably better than many other media outlets, including digital and legacy press.”