

## **Eddie McGuire overshadows the work Collingwood needs to do, say AFL Indigenous leaders**

*Two women working inside the AFL to tackle racism say nothing should distract from the recommendations of the Do Better report*



*Tanya Hosch (left) and Jodie Sizer. Hosch says transparency, honesty and action will be the guiding principles for Collingwood when implementing the Do Better report findings.*

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**T**wo of the most senior Indigenous people in the AFL say they're disappointed the departure of Eddie McGuire as Collingwood president has obscured the importance of the report that precipitated it, and say the work is still ahead of the club and the code. "One of the disappointments over the last few weeks has been the attention to Eddie as an individual, because the report doesn't actually speak to individuals," Collingwood board member and Djab Wurrung/Gunditjmara woman Jodie Sizer tells Guardian Australia.

"The conversation now is rightly focused on the important work in tackling systemic racism and putting in place the 18 recommendations in the Do Better report."

The AFL's inclusion manager, Tanya Hosch, a Torres Strait Islander woman, says McGuire's departure came as "some surprise" but has acted as a distraction.

“Yeah, absolutely. Because I think it’s all well and good for people to want to focus their criticism to one person, but the findings of the report – we’re talking about systemic issues.

“And I think that some opportunities were lost in not actually looking at the issues laid out in the report, because one person’s departure is not going to suddenly improve everything.”

Sizer, who is co-CEO of PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting, was appointed to the Collingwood board three years ago, and was instrumental in getting the board to commission the Do Better report.

“For me, in three years of being on the board, there’s not a conversation that I’ve had that doesn’t start with the challenging history of Collingwood’s past ... whether it’s the incomprehensible comments of Allan McAllister [former Collingwood president] or the many referenced incidents in the past,” she says.

“I love the club, and have always been passionate about football and the role of sport, and it’s a very big part of my family. On the other side of the coin, being a proud social justice advocate and trying to shift the dial, these two parts of my world didn’t line up.” Sizer says they “collided” last year when the board sought her advice on how to move forward.

“I thought an independent review was necessary, one with the calibre and credibility of the team led by Professor Larissa Behrendt, knowing full well that if we were to move forward, they would provide the attention to detail that was necessary.

“Systemic racism is often invisible, except for those who might experience it. I’m pleased that we are making steps and putting the foot down on the pedal to accelerate the action because I think we always learn by doing,” she says.

### **‘We’re going to take our battle scars, and so we should’**

This week, Collingwood announced the appointment of an expert panel on anti-racism, as recommended by the report. The panel will oversee the implementation of all 18 report recommendations, especially making amends to those it says have paid a “very, very high price” for speaking up about racism in the past.

“The panel will certainly have to consider each of the recommendations,” Sizer says.

“I think looking to our past is a key part of truth-telling for us as a nation. It feels like we’ve been talking about truth-telling for decades, we’ve been undertaking truth-telling through the royal commission into deaths in custody, through the stolen generations report and dozens of other publications. But I don’t think, at an organisational level, we’ve really adopted what that means.

“We’re going to take our battle scars and so we should, because there’s things that we do need to be sorry for, and coming to reconcile that does require truth, justice and healing.”

Sizer says doing better will be a challenge not just because of what the report identified as the “distinct and egregious” racism at Collingwood, but because there is no template

for fixing it. Collingwood, she says, will be the first club in the AFL to do this kind of work.

“I haven’t seen anyone that’s jumped up to say ‘let’s have a look at our past,’” she says.

“This independent review was a relatively short piece of work to look at the organisation specifically in how we respond, and what systems and policies, and what’s really exciting and yet challenging about it is this has such relevant application across the AFL code.”

Hosch and AFL general counsel Andrew Dillon are looking at the report and its implications for the code.

“One of the lines I keep coming back to, as I’m contemplating all of this, in the executive summary of the Do Better report, it says now’s the time for transparency, honesty and action,” Hosch says. “And I think that they are really going to be critical guiding principles in addressing this at all levels.

“That’s what we need to be focusing on now. I wouldn’t necessarily expect a different set of conclusions in other places as have been found in Collingwood, in relation to race.”

Hosch and Sizer are among a handful of Indigenous people in senior roles in the AFL, fighting for institutional progress, which takes its own toll.

“I’ve ended up becoming one of those people that likes to be inside the machine, that likes to be at the table,” Hosch says. “Jodie Sizer’s appointment to the Collingwood board has been integral in getting the club to this point and I’m sure that not every conversation she’s had in relation to this has been easy. Not that I expect them to be. Regardless, I do think you do have to put aside some of your own personal experiences in order to lead through these things from an institutional perspective. And that can be hard and it can be lonely.

“As Indigenous women, you’re talking about these things, but not really talking about them as they impact yourself. You’re really trying to bring attention to it more broadly for everyone else. That’s the job, and it’s a privilege to be able to try and do that. But there are times where you’d like to talk about some of your own lived experience and for that to be recognised.

“Having said that, one of the things that has become really apparent to me in the last few weeks is just how much people are potentially listening in a new way about what these issues are.”

The Collingwood anti-racism panel is due to deliver its first report on progress of the implementation of the Do Better recommendations in March.